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SUBJECT: FELIPE MUJICA ON HOW TO BEAT CHAVEZ

Classified By: ACTING POLITICAL COUNSELOR MARK WELLS FOR REASONS 1.4 (d
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SUMMARY

11. (C) On June 17, Political officers met with Felipe Mujica, President of Movimiento a Socialismo (MAS) and one of the leading Coordinadora Democratica (CD) negotiators with the National Electoral Council (CNE). Mujica outlined what he thought should be the CD's campaign strategy for the presidential recall referendum. He largely dismissed concerns about the automated voting process and laid out what he thought were the lessons learned from the failed Comando Ayacucho. End Summary.

How to win the recall

12. (C) Mujica said that the CD is trying to overcome infighting to select its campaign command, which would consist of 13 to 15 members. He warned that any effort by the CD to run on an anti-corruption platform would backfire, given the corruption of previous governments. Instead, the MAS President is encouraging the opposition to focus on Chavez's failures, particularly the deteriorating economic conditions of many Venezuelans. In addition, he believed that a plan that focuses on unity, peace, and the resolution of the political conflict would appeal to much of the public, which is tired of the ongoing crisis. Mujica pointed to the success the Chilean opposition had in using a similar strategy to defeat Pinochet.

13. (C) The MAS President noted that the CD is still developing its strategy, but was confident that the CD is on track. He also said that it would be clear by July 30 how the referendum would come out.

Not too worried about recent CNE decisions

14. (C) Mujica again dismissed any concerns that the wording of the recall question would benefit Chavez, repeating that "We Venezuelans are not idiots" and can properly read the recall question. In regards to the automated voting system, which has caused much angst within the opposition movement, the MAS President warned that a manual system would also have been vulnerable to tampering. Mujica acknowledged that the CD must negotiate as much control and supervision over the voting and tabulating process as possible. He appeared confident that the CD's computer experts, particularly in SUMATE, would strengthen the opposition's ability to properly monitor the automated system.

Chavistas afraid of telling the truth

15. (C) Mujica claimed the Chavistas' unwillingness to tell Chavez the truth contributed to the failure of the Comando Ayacucho in the signature appeals process. According to Mujica, Comando Ayacucho members were afraid to admit to Chavez that they were not going to be able to get enough people to recant their signatures in order to prevent a recall referendum vote. He also claimed that membership in the new Comando Maisanta is based solely on loyalty to Chavez.

COMMENT

16. (C) Mujica's thinking tracks with polls that suggest the opposition's ideal themes are reconciliation and

re-unification of Venezuela. The opposition still faces an

uphill battle and is hampered by its slow internal deliberations to select campaign leadership. As the recall vote approaches, the CD leadership will likely face increasing pressure to not only demonstrate Chavez's failures, but offer a viable alternative to the current government.
SHAPIRO

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